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Rugby Union

Rugby...1 Missus...0

By DAVID FACEY
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JONNY WILKINSON has started married life trying to come up with excuses for arriving home late.

England's 2003 World Cup hero, 34, admits his missus is puzzled by the hours he keeps.

The Toulon fly-half, who got hitched to Shelley Jenkins in October, explained: "I told her I'd be spending more time at home because I don't feel the need to train as much as I used to.

"And yet I'm getting home as late as ever, if not later.

"The answer is quite simply that, as I face up to the fact that I can't keep playing for ever, I find myself drawn horrendously towards coaching.

"I always thought that, by now, I would get the urge to do other things away from rugby.

"But I am studying the methods our coaches use more closely and it is starting to become an obsession with me.

"It's a pleasant surprise to learn I can still get the same buzz from the game without actually kicking a ball. I'm lucky I've got an understanding wife!"

That also explains Wilkinson's close involvement with the UK Coaching Awards Scheme. Their latest winners will be revealed at a glitzy function at the Montcalm Hotel in London tonight.

Former Newcastle star Wilko insists he is not planning to bring an end to his playing career just yet.

Although he admits he feels fortunate to still be performing at such a high level in France's Top 14.

He was voted European Player of the Season six months ago after helping Toulon win the Heineken Cup, landing a perfect 17 kicks at goal from 17 attempts in the knockout stages.

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image-descVERY UNDERSTANDING... Wilko's wife Shelley is used to his rugby obsession

But anyone who saw Wilko suffer a series of shoulder and 'stinger' injuries earlier in his career as the result of his

kamikaze tackling would have offered long odds against him playing beyond 30.

He explained: “I’m really pleased that I’m still going, especially as I got bashed about earlier in my career.

“And I do try to gear my training and lifestyle towards getting every ounce I can out of what time I’ve got left.

“I’m still a bit reckless at times and I get stuck in more than the coaches want me to. But that is a competitive streak you will never take out of me.

“I never imagined I’d be playing now, especially since the game has become so much more demanding since it went professional.

“I’ll be 35 before this season is over and I don’t think I would still be playing if I hadn’t made a conscious decision to look after myself a bit more in my middle years.

“But I am surprised I can still run around and do things as well as I can. I’m definitely still a big kid, playing a game I love for a living and enjoying every minute of it.

“As for retirement, it will always be a feeling of when the time is right, rather than plucking a date out of the air. If I wake up in the morning, feeling sore from head to toe — as I usually do — and I feel like I don’t really want to go training, then I’ll know it’s time to go.

“But when the desire is still there to get better and to play your heart out for the team, it isn’t as issue."

Wilkinson has been watching the England team building towards the 2015 World Cup with a sense of envy.

But he knows there is no way back after quitting the international scene in 2011, eight years after kicking England to World Cup glory.

He added: “England are on a really good path.

“But the way I have to limit my training — and the dreaded prospect of playing six or seven games in a few weeks — makes me appreciate that my role has to be one of a hugely-interested spectator."

JONNY WILKINSON was speaking ahead of tonight’s UK Coaching Awards, sponsored by Gillette as part of its Great Start programme, which celebrates and supports great coaching. For more information visit facebook.com/gilletteuk

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EVERLASTING LOVE... Jonny Wilkinson is still smitten with rugby union



Jonny with wife Shelley

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